Collins: Deepwater Program's Improved Capabilities "Absolutely Critical" to Ensuring U.S. Maritime Security

DHS Approves Revised Deepwater Implementation Plan

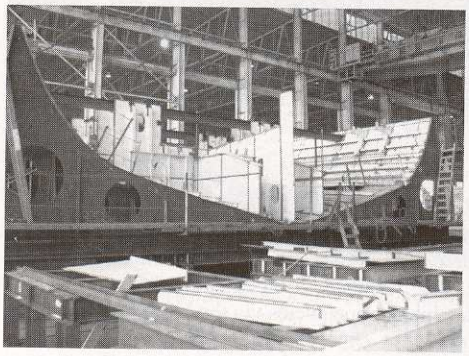
by Captain Gordon I. Peterson, USN (Ret.)

The Department of Homeland Security approved a revised Implementation Plan for the Integrated Deepwater System earlier this year that incorporates new design requirements to accommodate the Coast Guard's post-9/11 missions.

The revised Deepwater plan, developed as a part of the Coast Guard's fiscal year (FY) 2006 budget process, was forwarded as a report to Congress on March 25. The congressional report also presented the Deepwater asset line items that will be delivered to the Coast Guard in each fiscal year through FY 2010 if requisite funding is provided.

Commandant of the Coast Guard Admiral Thomas H. Collins told Congress April 20 that the revised implementation plan will posture the Deepwater Program to play an even greater role in reducing the future risk of a terrorist event in the United States. "This year's approval of a revised post-9/11 Deepwater Mission Need Statement and Implementation Plan are the most significant programmatic developments since we awarded the Deepwater contract in 2002," he said.

Testifying to the House Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation, the Commandant expressed his appreciation to the Department of Homeland Security, the administration, and Congress for their "strong support" in positioning the Coast Guard for its 21st-century mission set.



By early May, 100 per cent of the Deepwater Program's first National Security Cutter was under construction at Northrop Grumman Ship Systems shipyard in Pascagoula, Miss. The cutter's keel was laid in March, and the ship is scheduled for delivery to the Coast Guard in 2007. (Photo Courtesy of Northrop Grumman Ship Systems)

"Key in fiscal year 2006," he said, "is getting our capabilities right." The performance of individual platforms and Deepwater's overall system of systems will be evaluated over time to determine the eventual capacity — numbers of assets — needed to achieve Deepwater's performance-based goals. For this reason, Collins said, the revised post-9/11 Deepwater Implementation Plan's final strength at program completion indicates a range of assets in some categories.

A 20 to 25-Year Program

As projected in the revised Implementation Plan, it is now estimated that the Deepwater long-term acquisition will cost up to $24 billion over a period of 20 to 25 years. To reduce the future risk of a terrorist event in the U.S. homeland, the revised Deepwater Implementation Plan updates the original plan by modifying the original assets that would have been delivered by the Deepwater project to incorporate improved post-9/11 capabilities; retaining, upgrading, and converting aviation legacy assets (C-130s, H-60s, H-65s) as part of the Deepwater Program's final asset mix; and advancing the delivery of the Fast Response Cutter and Offshore Patrol Cutter by 10 and five years to 2007 and 2010, respectively.

In addition to delivering more capable operating assets for the Coast Guard's post-9/11 transformation to support DHS strategic goals and to reduce maritime security risk, the revised plan will enable the Deepwater Program to make more significant contributions to improved information sharing, collaboration, and interoperability in the maritime domain—essential capabilities to attain higher levels of maritime domain awareness (MDA).

According to Coast Guard officials, the revised Deepwater Implementation Plan's progressive modernization and recapitalization of the Coast Guard will provide improved, critically needed capabilities that are fundamental to its ability to deliver required levels of operational excellence necessary for the security of the nation and the safety of our citizens. The revised Implementation Plan, based on a revised post-9/11 Deepwater Mission Need Statement, advances the Deepwater acquisition by incorporating improved capabilities necessary to perform the Coast Guard's full range of post-9/11 missions, while sustaining and modernizing select legacy assets to operate effectively until replaced by Deepwater assets.

Appearing before the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation in April to testify on the Deepwater Program are, from left, Margaret T. Wrightson, director of homeland security and justice issues for the Government Accountability Office; Rear Adm. Patrick M. Stillman, Deepwater's program executive officer; and Commandant of the Coast Guard Adm. Thomas H. Collins. (Photo Courtesy of House of Representatives)

During his congressional testimony in April, Collins described how the revised Deepwater plan would result in a Coast Guard possessing the 21st-century technologies necessary to safeguard the nation and reduce the risk of a terrorist attack. "These enhanced capabilities were not included in the original Deepwater Program," he said. "However, these capabilities are absolutely critical to ensuring the maritime security of America and its $750 billion maritime transportation system." The Commandant also emphasized the importance of Deepwater's improved C4ISR systems in achieving higher levels of maritime domain awareness.

From a strategic perspective, the revised Deepwater plan provides for improved capabilities on individual assets as well as essential system-wide capability for the Coast Guard's full range of post-9/11 missions, including expanding requirements associated with maritime homeland security.

According to the Coast Guard, more capable and interoperable Deepwater platforms and systems will enable the service to shape the global maritime environment to promote U.S. national interests; know maritime conditions, vulnerabilities, and threats to prevent, protect, respond through improved maritime domain awareness; press out maritime borders; and

position the Coast Guard to act with greater certainty to reduce risk in a complex, uncertain environment.

The updated Deepwater Mission Need Statement and revised Implementation Plan were developed following a comprehensive, year-long performance-gap analysis of the Coast Guard's post-9/11 mission requirements. Today's Coast Guard, outfitted with assets designed for the threat environment of 30 to 40 years ago, lacks many of the maritime-security and network-centric capabilities that are essential for operational effectiveness in the 21st century.

Rear Admiral Patrick M. Stillman, Deepwater's program executive officer, and Margaret T. Wrightson, director of homeland security and justice issues for the Government Accountability Office (GAO), also testified to the House subcommittee with Collins in April.

Wrightson, commenting on management issues associated with the Deepwater acquisition, complimented the Coast Guard for its responsiveness addressing the numerous recommendations GAO has made to improve program execution and oversight. She said that she was "absolutely satisfied with the level of cooperation of the Coast Guard," noting she felt the Deepwater Program was "many weeks, not many months" from closing out other recommendations.

"Even with best effort some of these problems take time to resolve," she said in describing the challenge of managing a program of Deepwater's scope and complexity. "GAO has warned," Wrightson said, "that the Coast Guard's acquisition strategy, which relies on a prime contractor ('systems integrator') to identify and deliver the assets needed, carries substantial risk."

In his statement for the record and responses to questions from Subcommittee members, Collins said that he viewed the Coast Guard's cooperation with GAO as a partnership. "We take our stewardship seriously, and we will achieve program success through performance measures and accountability," he said. "Simply stated, the GAO is making active contributions to help us successfully execute this critical Deepwater Program."

Collins also said that Deepwater's Coast Guard-industry team (Integrated Coast Guard Systems, a joint venture of Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman) marked numerous important milestones during the past 12 months, including C4ISR upgrades to legacy cutters, the keel laying for the first National Security Cutter, and accelerated re-engining of HH-65 helicopters.

"The revised Deepwater Implementation Plan represents a significant investment in ensuring Coast Guard mission performance now and in the future," he said.

Captain Gordon I. Peterson, USN (Ret.) is a technical director for the Anteon Corporation's Center for Security Strategies and Operations assigned to the Coast Guard's Integrated Deepwater System program team.

More Capable Functional Requirements

The revised Deepwater Implementation Plan incorporates more capable functional requirements outlined in the new post-9/11 Deepwater Mission Need Statement, including:

- An ***innovative, interoperable network-centric system*** for C4ISR improvements to harness the power of an interoperable network to improve performance in all mission areas to ***improve maritime domain awareness*** and provide a ***common operational picture*** — key to Coast Guard leading the inter-agency effort to know and respond to maritime conditions, anomalies, vulnerabilities, and threats. Improvements to C4ISR enable earlier ***awareness*** of events through the more effective gathering and ***fusing*** of terrorism-related information, analysis, coordination, response — all critical to detecting, deterring, and defeating terrorist attacks. Upgrades to Deepwater surface assets, for example, contribute directly to improved intelligence collection and fusion through a sophisticated Shipboard Sensitive Compartmentalized Information Facility (S/SCIF), sensors, and increased data-exchange bandwidth;

- Improved maritime-security capabilities such as increased speed and integrated weapons systems on selected Deepwater cutters essential to higher levels of maritime homeland security during a terrorist attack, opposed boardings, and other high-risk operations;

- Helicopter airborne use of force and vertical insertion and delivery capabilities to allow helicopters to provide warning and/or disabling fire, and to deploy, deliver, and recover boarding teams safely and more effectively;

- Improved fixed-wing aircraft long-range surveillance to increase MDA and reduce maritime patrol aircraft shortfalls in operating hours; organic Coast Guard air transport will be able to deploy Maritime Safety and Security Teams and National Strike Force teams faster for response with their equipment.

- Improved capabilities for anti-terrorist/force protection on select Deepwater assets with all-weather self-defense and the ability to protect high-value assets; assets will have the capability to engage terrorists with higher assurance of survivability and continued mission capability; and

- Improved asset capabilities for detection and defense for chemical-biological-radiological (CBR) threats—essential to survival and continued operations during a CBR attack involving a weapon of mass destruction.

On April 11, the U.S. Coast Guard transferred the first of five re-engined HH-65 Dolphin helicopters to Coast Guard Air Station Atlantic City, N.J., under the Deepwater Program's modernization and recapitalization of the Coast Guard. The remaining four helicopters were subsequently delivered in May to provide the unit with a full complement of aircraft. (USCG Photo by PA1 Kim Smith, USCG PADET Atlantic City)